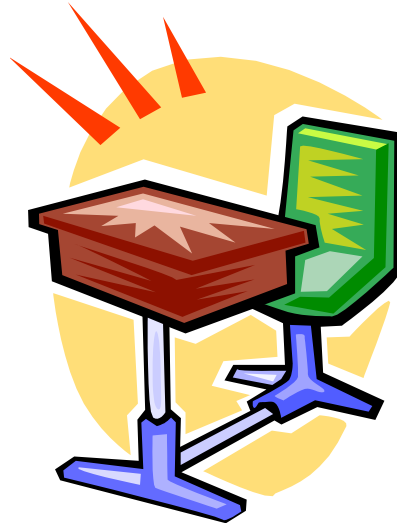


Philosophical Chairs

A tool to teaching critical thinking



Presented by

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Philosophical Chairs

Subject Matter Application:

In theory, learning happens when students use critical thinking to resolve subsequent conflicts, which arise when presented with alternative perspectives, ideas or contradictions to what they have previously learned or believed. "Philosophical Chairs" is a technique to allow students to critically think, verbally ponder and logically write their beliefs.

Procedure:

- Students read, prior to coming to class, a newspaper article, short story, essay or literary selection, taking notes as they read; bring those notes to class.
- After reading and taking notes students are presented with a second or third level question that will elicit thought and discussion. Teacher can provide question for first few discussions and may allow students to collaborate to create future questions if so desired. (Example questions following)
- The chairs are then placed in a horseshoe seating arrangement, with the two ends longer than the back. (Illustration following)
- Students are told they will argue the merits of the question and that their choice of seat during the discussion will illustrate their position. If they believe the answer to the question is "yes," they should sit on the right, if they believe the answer to the question is "no," they should sit on the left, and, if they are "undecided," they should sit at the back of the horseshoe. They will have the opportunity to move as their minds change.
- Choose a student moderator whose job is to see that everyone gets a chance to speak.
- To gain full credit, a student must speak at least two times.

Tips for the Task Master:

- Set ground rules about the discussion before it starts. (Sample rules following)
- Set a time limit for the discussion.
- Require students to summarize the previous speaker before they are allowed to present their arguments.
- Teacher should moderate the first and, if needed, the second time.
- If class has too many students to engage them all, you can have a subsection "take the stage" and have that group take notes and then debrief the rest of the class as to who had the "pivotal point(s)" that ultimately persuaded adoption of one side or the other.
- If all students have not read the material and taken notes, have a section of the room where they must go and cannot join the discussion until they have the notes. They also cannot be full group members so a hot seat is placed in the horseshoe to allow those members who have finished their notes to make a statement and then move out of the group. They cannot participate any further.
- Moderator keeps track of students who have spoken and the number of times they did so.

Evaluation:

- Students write a metacognitive reflection responding to questions either related to the material read or to the technique of "Philosophical Chairs" (Evaluation sheet for "Philosophical Chairs" following)
- Simple rubric and score sheet for student speeches (Rubric and score sheet following)

Question Levels and Sample Questions/Opening Statements

Question Levels

Level One Questions Will:

- Define
- Describe
- Identify
- List
- Name
- Observe
- Recite

The above should not be used in forming questions for "Philosophical Chairs." The debate will not flow nor will there be the conflict needed to have a successful experience.

Level Two Questions Will:

- Analyze
- Compare
- Contrast
- Group
- Infer
- Sequence
- Synthesize

Level Three Questions Will:

- Apply a principle
- Evaluate
- Hypothesize
- Imagine
- Judge
- Predict
- Speculate

The above should be used in forming questions. They allow for more ideas and different beliefs to be expressed more freely, which is what the debate wants.

Sample Questions/Opening Statements

While reading *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare:

In Act V scene 2, Fortinbras Says:

“Let four captains
Bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage,
For he was likely, had he been put on,
To have proved most royal; and for his passage,
The soldier's music and the rite of war
Speak loudly for him.”

Fortinbras feels that Hamlet would have made a good soldier. What he does not know is that Hamlet was at war with his Uncle and had acted as a soldier. Evaluate this statement by agreeing or disagreeing with it.

While reading “Civil Disobedience” by Henry David Thoreau:

“The government is best which governs least”

If acts of civil disobedience do not harm the government or its people, then jailing those who commit those acts is useless.

While reading To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee:

In chapters 1 through 6, we meet Jem, Scout, Atticus and Dill, as well as other members of Maycomb community. The children, Scout, Jem and especially Dill, are obsessed with the Finch's neighbor Boo Radley. The obsession creates problems for both Boo Radley and the Finches. The need to know is more important than personal privacy.

After listening to/reading Colin Powell's speech before the United Nations on February 5, 2003:

War with Iraq is necessary to maintain the peace and stability in the world.

More Topics for Discussion

1. Most people care enough about the environment to make personal sacrifices to save it.
2. The United States should not sell arms to any foreign country.
3. Students should be able to select their own teachers.
4. Children should never be physically punished.
5. Unclaimed animals in the pound should be used for medical research.
6. It was easier to grow up when my parents were kids than it is for me now.
7. Legalization of drugs would result in less crime.
8. It is the duty of the United States to send money to foreign countries suffering from poverty and lack of food.
9. Any censorship of music or art is wrong.
10. Rock music contributes to a rebellious attitude in some teenagers.
11. Nuclear arms are necessary.
12. Every student has the opportunity to succeed in our school.

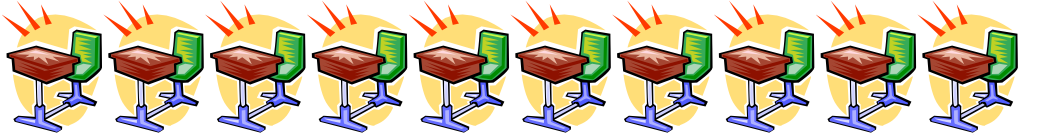
Philosophical Chairs

Rules of Engagement

- **Read** the material for the debate and the opening statement carefully; be sure you understand it
- **Listen** to the person who is speaking
- **Understand** the person's point of view
- **Contribute** your own thoughts, offering your reasons as succinctly as possible
- **Respond** to statements only, not to the personality of the person giving it
- **Change** your mind about the statement as new information or reasoning is presented
- **Move** to the opposite side or to the undecided chairs as your thinking grows and changes
- **Support** the Mediator in maintaining order and helping the discussion to progress
- **Reflect** on the experience via the closing activity or assignment

Illustration # 1

"YES"



"HOT SEAT"



"C Z E W C H D E D D"



"NO"

Philosophical Chairs

Written Evaluation Sheet

Please respond candidly and specifically to the following questions:

1. What was the most frustrating portion of the exercise?
2. What was the most successful portion of the exercise?
3. What was said that caused you to change your seat, or what was said that caused you not to change your seat?
4. What conclusions can you draw about how you form your beliefs?
5. What conclusion can you draw about the nature of forming beliefs as it might relate to this activity?

"Philosophical Chairs"

Speech Rubric

Summary of Previous Speech:

- 1/Not Used = Did not do any summary
- 2/Little Used = Had a reference but not information
- 3/Acceptable Use = Made reference and included facts
- 4/Excellent Use = Restated arguments and included facts
- 5/Outstanding Use = Restated arguments and all facts

Thoughtful Reflection:

- 1/Not Used = Did not have understanding of the topic
- 2/Little Used = Had superficial understanding of the topic
- 3/Acceptable Use = Understood topic well enough to explain own argument
- 4/Excellent Use = Explained most of complexity of the topic
- 5/Outstanding Use = Complexity of the topic explained and used argumentation

Use of Specific Examples:

- 1/Not Used = No examples from the text
- 2/Little Used = One example from the text
- 3/Acceptable Use = Several examples from the text with some explanation
- 4/Excellent Use = Examples from the text with each explained
- 5/Outstanding Use = Examples from the text with each explained and extended to fit the argument

Usage and Grammar:

- 1/Not Used = Errors in agreement and non-standard English
- 2/Little Used = Informal English and words like "you know" and "thing"
- 3/Acceptable Use = Standard English usage and complete ideas
- 4/Excellent Use = Standard English usage with no mistakes and with use of some allusions
- 5/Outstanding Use = Standard English usage with not mistakes and with the use of allusions and precise references to develop arguments

"Philosophical Chairs"

Score Sheet

Name _____ Evaluator _____
 Topic _____ Date _____

Speech 1

1 = Not Used 2 = Little Use 3 = Acceptable Use 4 = Excellent Use 5 = Outstanding Use

Summary of Previous Speech	1	2	3	4	5	
Thoughtful reflection	1	2	3	4	5	
Use of Specific Examples	1	2	3	4	5	
Usage and Grammar	1	2	3	4	5	
TOTAL						

Speech 2

1 = Not Used 2 = Little Use 3 = Acceptable Use 4 = Excellent Use 5 = Outstanding Use

Summary of Previous Speech	1	2	3	4	5	
Thoughtful reflection	1	2	3	4	5	
Use of Specific Examples	1	2	3	4	5	
Usage and Grammar	1	2	3	4	5	
TOTAL						